

## AUNT DELIE (Cordelia Wilson)



It is hard to realize in this era of modern hospitals, skilled doctors, adequate transportation, and great progress that conditions were vastly different a couple of generations ago. (50 years)

In the bygone days, when doctors were really scarce, the Midwife was the nucleus of community life. The early settlers were a child-bearing people, and life centered around the family. It was essential that the midwife be near at hand. As Dr. Harold Broodman says, "There is no other human being in the world more useful or important than a woman who dedicates her life to nursing others". As she delivered a baby, she typified dependability and usefulness. With kindness and determination, she was always willing to help a family in need.

During the early days in Midway, the women were attended by just such a kind and skilled midwife and nurse, Aunt Delie. She had the strength and courage to shoulder the hardships and responsibilities that few of us would undertake today.

We all agree that our dear Aunt Delie had the right idea about what good health is all about. She knew what herbal remedies to take if you were coming down with a cold or fighting off an infection. After a long hard winter, she said that spring was the time to refresh the spirit and tone up the system with a tonic. Aunt Delie encouraged everyone to gather roots and barks and plants in the proper season, dry them, and store them in a dry place. (We tied ours in bundles to the granary rafters). People made tea from them and used them as needed. Common spring tonics were sassafras, yarrow, horehound, peppermint, and catnip.

She knew a great deal about the natural world of food and medicine and was a strict believer in letting nature dictate your diet. Such natural and whole foods as grains and vegetables, natural cheese, butter, whole milk, eggs, and home-grown meats were a part of her philosophy. She recommended herb teas instead of coffee - camomile, catnip, mint, and sassafras.

Instantly, upon opening her kitchen door, the odor of asafetida greeted us. The entire house reeked with this unpleasant smell. I can see in memory the flour coated bowl used in handrolling the small asafetida pills. These were used for medicinal purposes.

Bringing babies into the world was not the only part of her work as a nurse and midwife. I've seen her use athimble to rub a stubborn tooth through for a crying baby. She treated earaches, toothaches, pneumonia, and all childhood diseases - even serious cases of shingles with great skill. During serious diptheria and influenza epidemics, she would work eighteen hours or more a day.

Various kinds of poultices were her constant helpers, especially, the mustard plaster for respiratory diseases. She could whip out a recipe for this poultice without batting an eye. She'd say to take one tablespoon of mustard, 2 tablespoons of flour and mix them together with water. Spread between layers of cloth and apply to oiled skin until the skin reddens. It's great for chest colds!

She used red flannel strips to wrap a swollen and painful rheumatic joint. Molasses and sulphur was a popular spring tonic with her. A couple of drops of kerosene on a teaspoon of sugar would break up a serious bout with croup.

Lots of boiling water with lysol or carbolic acid was so essential in maternity cases. Aunt Delie always put her dressings and pieces of thin muslin in the oven of the stove in order to kill germs. Sterile bandages were an unknown commodity at that time.

Aunt Delie knew how to calm our fears while nature took its course. She erased all local and hand-me-down superstitions and fears, for we had been indoctrinated with many from our elderly aunts - immigrants from Ireland and Scotland.

Farmers with animal problems would seek her advice. Even young people took their pets for her to treat. There were no veterinarians.

My brother Grant recalls very vividly an experience when a small boy: "One wintry morning, as we approached the stable to milk the cows, we noticed a newly born calf struggling on the shed floor. As Father was helping it to its feet, I noted a queer look on his face. He mentioned the fact that its back end wasn't quite right. Upon close examination, we found that it had no rectal opening of any kind. It was such a big, strong steer calf that Father had no desire to do away with it. We discussed various approaches to the problem and wondered if an opening could be made. There wasn't a veterinarian living within 50 miles so that idea was dismissed."

"Often, we'd taken dogs, rabbits, cats and even bantam hens to Aunt Delie for help, and she seemed to perform magic. I suggested timidly to Father that Aunt Delie might know what to do. He said it wouldn't hurt to have her come. Then I really felt guilty about my suggestion, for how could we approach a woman about such an intimate thing."

"She studied various angles and spots and finally said, 'Right here.' Well! Father sank the razor sharp knife into the designated spot. Everything worked out fine. Later, we found that the incision was a little to the left from the splatterings in that direction. But the job really worked - thanks to Aunt Delie. After a couple of months of all the rich milk and meal it could eat, Father sold it for a top-notch veal."

Aunt Delie took no chances with diagnosis. If she couldn't solve the problem with skill, she'd refer the patient to the nearest doctor - even at times taking them herself with horse and buggy.

Aunt Delie's wisdom, great character, and long remembered service has touched all of us deeply.

An imposing six foot monument in the Midway Cemetery bears this inscription:

*Erected May 30, 1929  
By the  
Hawthorn Camp  
of the Daughters of Utah  
Pioneers and Loving Friends  
of Wasatch County*

*in Loving Memory of  
"Aunt Delie"  
Cordelia Wilson  
For her faithful service  
to the sick and needy  
1848-1922*

## AUNT DELIE'S KITCHEN

Everything seemed to pirouette around Aunt Delie's big square kitchen. Was it because there was no central heating then? Or was it the lack of time to organize things in other places? Everything needed to keep house was stacked into this room. Even an old couch was placed in a corner by the window for relaxation and to watch people working in the orchard and fields. It was also used when patients needed an examination.

The Monarch stove dominated the room with a wood box between it and the wall. A big iron tea kettle and three flat irons occupied an important part on the stove permanently -always ready for use. A pan of sour milk was often found sitting on the cooler area of the stove, turning into cottage cheese.

The oven had a million uses. It might be filled with wet wood to be dried for daily use or to start the morning fire. Drying damp clothes, soothing cold feet, and scorching a clean piece of muslin to kill germs were among the additional uses. A batch of bread would be placed in the door for quick rising or ready for early morning baking. That oven must be turned out hundreds of gooseberry and rhubarb pies, not to mention rice puddings, cookies, and cakes.

The old sideboard in the kitchen was a popular piece of furniture in days gone-by. Instead of functioning as designed, it was a catchall. The boys would empty their pockets of nails, bullets, knives, and even muskrat tails on the sideboard. There were Aunt Delie's sidecombs, bone hairpins, clippings, recipes, buttonhooks, buttons, spools of thread, and a ball of string on it too. A glass of water magnified her grinning artificial teeth. If anyone asked about them, she would say, "I just put them there to rest". The bottom shelves of the sideboard were crammed full of dried catnip, horehound, sage and camomile herbs.

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